

**“Healing and Transformation  
Given in Christ  
Fulfilled through the Spirit”**

**CCC 7th General Assembly, Panama, June 11, 2005**

**Message to the churches and people of the Caribbean region**

The Officers of the Caribbean Conference of Churches and Delegates gathered in Panama (June 9-16, 2005) for the Seventh General Assembly of the CCC, wish to express Christian solidarity with the Churches and people of all territories in the region who daily have to cope with the vicissitudes of life, some of which are the escalation in crime, kidnapping and killing, violence, sexual and domestic abuse, and the economic spin-off of globalisation.

Notwithstanding these death-dealing realities, the people of the Caribbean still cling to their God and attempt to apply faith to life for the good of society. We commend them for their bravery and fortitude.

The Assembly also wishes to express deep concern for those territories that have been ravaged by natural disasters in recent times: hurricanes; earthquakes; and flooding. We especially commiserate with those who lost loved ones as a result of these occurrences, and hope that comfort and consolation will be theirs as they grieve — even with hope in the Resurrection.

Natural disasters are certainly not uncommon to the region; however, when they do occur with such drastic, far-reaching and disastrous effects, the words of the psalmist can pinpoint our people’s positioning of themselves as “sojourners in gloom and shadow dark as death” [Ps 107: 8a].

This is especially so for those in the Windward Islands who, for more than 25 years, have been spared the ravaging experiences of hurricanes that are more typical of the Leeward Islands and the Greater Antilles.

Consequently, the trauma that Grenada experienced on September 7, 2004 will undoubtedly take a long time to be erased from the memory of individuals and from the collective psyche of the nation. Houses have been flattened, churches, government buildings and places of business have either been reduced to rubble or have been seriously damaged. On top of all that, the agricultural sector has been badly damaged.

Evidently, lives of people have been drastically altered with plans jettisoned or put on hold indefinitely; but more importantly, young children, having been traumatised, will need much careful attention to help them overcome the attendant nightmares.

Being no respecter of persons or territories, hurricanes “Ivan”, “Jane” and “Francis” lashed mercilessly parts of The Bahamas, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica and did not spare the relatively flat lands of the Cayman Islands, thereby dislocating men, women and children and causing grave inconveniences.

These admittedly deadly hurricanes suddenly disrupted lives that were altered, and affected adversely the tourist industry and financial enterprises that are so crucial for the survival of our brothers and sisters and their families.

Haiti, in particular, could hardly afford to entertain such an unwelcome ‘guest’, especially when the “Pearl of the Caribbean” was observing its 200th anniversary of Independence. These hurricanes were certainly no respecter of persons or territories!

Guyana, though spared the ravages of “Ivan the Terrible”, nevertheless was sorely ravaged by unexpected flooding, specifically Georgetown, where the Caribbean Conference of Churches was at the time conducting a consultation for the region.

The inconvenience affected local and overseas workshop participants alike. It was not a pretty scene, especially when the flood waters threatened the health of people and occasioned the immoral escalation of prices on commodities needed for survival.

“Nature Island”, Dominica, was greeted on the early Sunday morning of November 21, 2004, by the rumblings of a frightful earthquake. Fortunately, those church buildings that were devastated were vacant at the time because the concerned congregations of those Churches had gone to another place for worship. Otherwise, many lives would have been lost. Rebuilding these churches is no easy feat at this time of harsh economic downturn.

Surely it will take a long time -- perhaps years in the case of some -- to overcome and transcend these horrendous experiences and their sad consequences. But overcome you will, for the gift of transcendence is deeply rooted in the Caribbean soul that is accustomed to suffering and struggle.

It is understood that several of the Member Churches of the CCC have already contributed their “widow’s mite” to assist in relief work, but contrasted with the devastation, such contributions are only symbolic of Christian care and concern.

Would that more could have been done! Nevertheless, citing the wonted resilience of Caribbean people honed from past socio-political experiences, the participants of the 7th General Assembly of the Caribbean Conference of Churches are sure that once again you will overcome the unfortunate effects of these natural disasters.

The indomitable faith of Caribbean people in a loving and caring God, who is ever present in human struggles and progress, will indeed help both the countries concerned and the Church communities in particular to surmount and reconstruct in such a way that structures will be that much stronger and safer for any eventuality of the future. Out of

every chaotic moment a new and better beginning emerges like the phoenix from its ashes.

The 7th General Assembly's theme is "Healing and Transformation: given in Christ and fulfilled through the Holy Spirit." Having lifted up the territories and the Churches of all the disaster-affected areas, the Officers and Delegates pray that God's healing power will touch all lives concerned and bring about that much-needed transformation that only God Himself can give.

May trust in God's abiding Presence and effective Power never grow dim in the heart and soul of one and all!